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ABSTRACT

The increase in maternal employment has affected society and children. Indications are that the increased numbers of working mothers had impacted the size of families and the birth intervals within them. In addition, as children experience life with a working mother, personal constructs of adult roles and attitudes towards maternal employment can be expected to change. A study was conducted to examine the differences in attitudes between young adult male and female respondents in 1990 and in 2000 concerning maternal employment. Responses of 746 undergraduates were obtained for both years on the Beliefs about the Consequences of Maternal Employment Scale (BACMEC) and author-devised items assessing attitudes toward family of origin, career goals, and family plans. No difference in cost benefit of maternal employment was indicated between the groups. However, the responses from the year 2000 showed a greater expectation of mothers working either part time or not at all during their youngest child's infancy. Today's young adults are hoping to avoid maternal employment during their children's infancy, while simultaneously endorsing maternal employment during their children's school years. A shift was noted in male support of maternal employment during the school years. (Contains 11 references.) (JDM)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT IN MALE AND FEMALE YOUNG ADULTS: 1990 versus 2000

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Summary.—The present study examined the differences between attitudes towards maternal employment among young adult male and female respondents in 1990 and 2000. Responses of 746 undergraduates were obtained in 1990 and 2000 on the BACMEC and author-devised items assessing attitudes toward family of origin and the young adults' own career and family plans. Subjects were grouped on the basis of the survey period in order to determine if attitudes had changed over time. No difference in cost/benefit of maternal employment was indicated between the groups. However, the 2000 respondents had a greater expectation of working either part time or not at all during their youngest child's infancy. Results also indicate a shift in male support of maternal employment during the school years.

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Introduction

In modern society, significant discrepancies exist between traditional gender-role expectations and real life demands. In direct contrast to the gender composition of the current workforce, females are still perceived as primarily responsible for quality of family relationships and domestic tasks. Realistically, both men and women, within and outside of the family increasingly encounter demands and opportunities.

United States census data from 1990 indicates that even then, two-paycheck families were common among families with children under the age of 12 months. The rate of maternal employment for two-parent families with children under six years of age has more recently been found to be 62.3% (Johnson, 1997). The steady growth of the maternal employment trend over the last 25 years affords the opportunity to study a population of young adults that have personally experienced the effects of maternal employment in greater numbers than ever before.

For the last two decades, much attention has been given to the increase in maternal employment and the effect on children. Public perception often associates maternal employment with negative effects on children. However, the widespread practice of maternal employment may influence attitudes of today's young adults as well as future generations. While many women work out of economic need, many others work for self-fulfillment. It is important to examine the attitudes of young adults to assess the level of conflict related to maternal employment that they will face as they enter adulthood.

In many ways, maternal employment is shaping the size and structure of the family. A study of Canadian mothers (Rahim, 1993) indicates a relationship between maternal employment and timing of having children. The data showed that the women who had some work experience were more likely to have longer birth intervals in comparison to the women who did not work outside the home. (42% of the women who had never worked would more likely have a second birth within twenty-four months from the first birth, compared to the 27% who had worked). This study also found that women who worked were less likely to have more than two children in comparison to women who never worked outside the home.

Those women who were employed for a longer period during married lives were found to have smaller families and have longer intervals of birth. (The probability of having the second child within a two-year period after the first child was .42 for mothers who did not work, .33 for women who worked before marriage, .23 for mothers working only after marriage, and .28 for mothers who have always worked).

Groat, Workman, & Neal, (1976) found that, in general, the longer a wife has worked, the longer the spacing between marriage and her first child birth. They concluded that this demonstrates the mothers attempt to avoid conflicts between job and children. Secondly, it was found that the women who used contraceptives earlier in marriage also engage in continuous employment more often than those who did not use contraceptives early in marriage. Jones (1975) also found that women who worked had significantly longer birth intervals than women who did not work. This difference was most notable during the

early stages of forming a family. In addition, Jones found that women who held positive attitudes towards their jobs tended to have the desired number of children before working to avoid work interruptions.

In contrast to the function and composition of many modern American families, attitudes of parents continue to favor traditional family structures (two parents, working father). If a mother works for economic reasons, she is looked upon more favorably than if she works just because she wants to. 81% of mothers and 67% of fathers say that it is OK for mothers to work if they really need the money. However, 47.5% of employed parents strongly or somewhat agree that mothers who do not need to work for economic reasons should not work (Galinsky, 1999).

In modern society, significant discrepancies exist between traditional gender-role expectations and real life demands. In direct contrast to the gender composition of the current workforce, females are still perceived as primarily responsible for quality of family relationships and domestic tasks (Baber & Allen, 1992). Realistically, both men and women, within and outside of the family increasingly encounter demands and opportunities.

Ivey and Yakutas (1996) conducted a study to determine whether perceptions of family and family member functioning are a function of the combined and interacting effects of stereotypic gender role expectations, attitudes, and family histories. Traditional patriarchal families were characterized by elevated paternal (relative to maternal) involvement in decision making and diminished paternal involvement in family tasks and childcare. Traditional gender-role attitudes were determined by maternal employment viewed as more costly and less beneficial in terms of effects on child development. Ivey and Yakutas hypothesized that traditional patriarchal family history would relate to critical perceptions of nontraditional, matriarchal families. Further, individual personal family history characterized by patriarchal family structure combined with traditional gender-role attitudes would be associated with critical perceptions of individuals within families who interact in a manner inconsistent with functioning within a traditional family structure.

The researches concluded that adult views of families and individuals within family settings appear to be a combined function of pre-existing and situational factors. Results indicated that participants' expression of bias may be a product of interaction between individual attributes and immediate conditions. Further, this relationship indicates that perception of families and the individuals within them are not exclusively determined by personal history. A complex and potentially variable relationship was indicated between level of paternal involvement (traditional family structure) and attitude toward gender roles. Family history appears to be related to transmission of role expectations.

Jackson and Tein (1998) studied the influence of gender, maternal employment, and employment goals of adolescents in the development of personal stereotypes of adult gender roles. Gender role is defined as a set of expectations that prescribe how males and females should behave, feel and think. Development of gender role expectations

intensifies during adolescence as youngsters experience their own gender specific physical and social changes.

Personal construction of gender roles are based on flexible frames of reference to adult and gender and guided by social learning and internal motivation to conform to socio-cultural stereotypes (Jackson & Tein, 1998). Jackson and Tein studied personal constructs and gender, employment goals and maternal employment in order to identify the role of personal family experience in the development of adult role stereotypes. They studied these factors at two times during adolescent development in order to investigate the formation of the concept of adult in relation to these variables. However, they warn that personal constructs may reflect idealistic, rather than realistic characterizations of adult roles. Studies by Ryff (1991) and Cross and Markus (1991) identified a gap between real and ideal self during adolescence. Jackson and Tein point out that if the development personal stereotypes of adults include ideology, attributions of responsibility, fairness, and commitment, then these stereotypes, or personal constructs, may also represent idealistic views.

Findings from the study indicate that gender, transition stage (pre/early adolescence and mid/late adolescents), future plan and maternal employment status influenced expectations and concepts of adult roles as mother/father, husband/wife, worker and parent. The results partially support previous literature, which indicates that adolescent females generally express non-traditional attitudes towards gender roles. In addition, older adolescent males were found to be significantly more traditional. Interestingly, younger boys with employed mothers who planned to enter work roles did not report a negative impact associated with maternal employment on the family or marital relationship

Further study of the effect of maternal employment on adult role construction is indicated. The importance of this is underscored by the frequency of maternal employment in society today with fewer than 7% of families reflecting the traditional two parent model of father as worker and mother as homemaker (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1987). A large body of literature supports that children are not adversely affected by maternal employment. However, findings from this study indicate that maternal employment influences personal constructs of adult roles, particularly in adolescent boys.

The increase in maternal employment has effected our society and our children. It is indicated that the increased numbers of working mothers has impacted the size of families and the birth intervals within them. In addition, as more children experience life with a working mother, personal constructs of adult roles and attitudes towards maternal employment can be expected to change. With a growing population of young adults who have been raised by working moms, the opportunities exist to study the many effects of maternal employment.

A comparison of survey responses between a 1990 and 2000 sample was expected to result in greater acceptance of maternal employment from both male and female

respondents. It was hypothesized that perceived costs associated with maternal employment would be lower for the 2000 group based on personal experience.

Method

Subjects:
The subjects used in this study were 746 college students who were enrolled in introductory psychology courses at Ursinus College in Pennsylvania. The 1990 sample consisted of 215 male participants and 450 females, with a total of 665 subjects. The 2000 sample consisted of 18 males and 63 female participants, with a total of 81 subjects. The subjects ranged in age from 18-27 years of age.

Procedure:
The packet used in this study was handed out to subjects in the introductory psychology class in which they were enrolled. Subjects were asked if they would fill out the packet in its entirety. Ample time was given to the subjects to complete the questionnaire.

The packet used in this study consisted of the 24-item BACMEC, which yields scores for the participants' perceptions of both the benefits and costs associated with maternal employment, items assessing subjects' plans for their own and their future spouse's participation in the workforce after having children (both preferences and expectations), along with pages designed to obtain background information about each subject. The subjects were first asked their sex and age. Subjects then gave information about their mother's work status at each period of development. The stages of development and ages of each stage of development are as follows" infancy (birth to 1 1/2 years), preschool (age 2-5), childhood (age 6-12), and adolescence (age 13-15). The subjects were to report whether their mothers worked part-time, full-time or not at all at each stage of development.

Subjects also disclosed information about their mother's job, indicating whether it was professional, white collar, or blue collar work. The last question on background information requires the subjects to answer whether or not they had been raised in a single parent household at any time throughout their lives. Subjects from single-parent households were excluded from the sample.

Results

Directionally adjusted scores were totalled to create summary scores for each participant on both the BACMEC Benefits and Coasts scales. Between-group t-tests revealed no significant difference between the 1990 and the 2000 samples on scores on the BACMEC Benefits and Costs scales.

A between-group t-test demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the respondents' preference to work during their youngest child's first two years ($t = 2.79$, $df = 690$, $p=.006$). Both males and females in the 2000 sample indicated less willingness to work full-time when their youngest child was less than 1.5 years of age.

For the year 2000 sample, nearly three-quarters (74%) said they would prefer not to work at all when their youngest child was an infant. In contrast, less than one-half (44%) prefer not to work when the youngest child is of pre-school age (two to five years old). The majority (82%) want to work when their youngest child is six to twelve years old. Similarly, most (84%) would prefer to work when their youngest child is adolescent (13 to 18 years old)

For the 1990 sample, slightly more than one-half (58%) said they would prefer not to work when their youngest child was an infant. Less than one-half (41%) prefer not to work when their youngest child is pre-school age. Most (63%) would prefer to work when their youngest child is six to twelve years old. The majority (68%) want to work when their youngest child is 13 to 18 years old.

A between-group t-test demonstrated a statistically significant difference ($t = 2.88$, $df = 677$, $p=.004$) in the respondents' expected work status during their youngest child's infancy (0 to 1.5 years of age). The 2000 sample scored higher in this category (mean = 2.35, S.D. .79), indicating a greater expectation of working part time or not at all during this period than the 1990 sample (mean = 2.05, S.D. .89).

For the year 2000 sample, more than half (53%) expected not to work at all during the first 1.5 years of the youngest child's life. More than one-quarter (26%) said they would work part time during this period. In contrast, less than one-half (42%) expected to work full time when the youngest child was of pre-school age (two to five years old). The expectations of part time and no employment were roughly equivalent for this developmental period (27% part time and 28% no employment). Employment expectations during the six to twelve year period were 78% full-time, 17% part-time, and 3% no employment. For the 13 to 18 age period, the entire sample expects to work (86% full-time and 11% part-time).

For the year 1999 sample, slightly more than one-third (36%) expected not to work at all during the first 1.5 years of the youngest child's life. Less than one-quarter (18%) said they would expect to work part-time during this period. Approximately one-third (32%) said they would work full-time during this period. In contrast, slightly less than one-half (48%) expected to work full time when the youngest child is of pre-school age (two to five years old). Part time and no employment frequencies are similar for this period (21% part time and 17% no employment). Expectations during the six to twelve year period were 69% full-time, 14% part-time, and 3% no employment. For the 13 to 18 age period, 80% expected to work full time, 4% part-time, and .4% expected no outside employment

A between group t-test demonstrated no significant difference between the 1990 and 2000 groups for the age they expected to have children or the number of children they expected to have. Between group t-tests revealed a statistically significant difference between the groups on percent of income the respondent expected to contribute to the household ($t=2.19$, $df=676$, $p<.05$). The 1990 sample's expectation was slightly higher than that of the 2000 sample (1990 mean=52.69%, sd=17.54, versus 2000 mean=48.23%, sd=13.26).

Discussion

Overall, there was no difference between the two samples' perceptions of the costs and benefits associated with maternal employment. This is surprising, given the fact that maternal employment has statistically become far more normative in the past decade. Apparently this has not substantially influenced young adults' atitudes about the impact of maternal employment on children's development.

However, the results illustrate a clear change in the employment expectation of young adults during their children's first two years of life. The 2000 group indicated significantly less willingness to work during this period of early childhood. Analysis of work status expectations shows that the 2000 group has a greater expectation of working only part-time or not at all during this period.

In relation to spousal employment expectations, year 2000 male respondents indicated a greater expectation for their spouse to work when their children are between the ages of 6 to 12 years. This difference in male attitude may indicate an important shift from traditional sex-role expectations. Since most research has revealed that males are more likely to hold these traditional attitudes, the findings are important.

Overall, the results suggest that, more so than a decade ago, today's young adults are hoping to avoid maternal employment during their children's infancy , while simultaneously more strongly endorsing maternal employment during their children's school years.

It should be noted that the differences in sample size and composition deserve consideration. The 2000 group was considerably smaller than the 1990 group. In addition, the male/female ratio was variable across the samples; the 1990 group was 32% male as opposed to only 22% in the 2000 group. The greater proportion of females in the 2000 sample may account for the higher percentage of expected contribution to household income found in the 1990 group. Since males are generally still expected to earn more than females, it is likely that the greater number of males in the 1990 sample produced the higher income expectations. Further study with proportionately larger samples is indicated.

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